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TAGS: PREL PARM KNNP KPAL EG IR IS

SUBJECT: U/S JOSEPH'S APRIL 13 MEETING WITH EGYPTIAN  
FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUL GHEIT

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶11. (C) Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit in Cairo April 13 to discuss regional security issues. The meeting focused on efforts to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions, with U/S Joseph pressing for solid GOE support for diplomacy and a range of defensive measures to address Iranian brinksmanship. Aboul Gheit stated Egypt's agreement on the need to prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons, but argued hard for diplomacy to prevail, and for the U.S. to similarly pressure Israel to abandon its nuclear program. Aboul Gheit responded positively to a call for stronger GOE support to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and sought detailed information on the recent U.S.-India nuclear deal. End summary.

¶12. (U) Under Secretary Joseph was accompanied by the Ambassador, CENTCOM J-5 RADM Moeller, T Senior Advisors Jason Ellis and Greg Richard, and Embassy political officer (notetaker). Aboul Gheit was joined by Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs Naella Gabr, Disarmament Affairs Office Director Hossam Ali, and several Cabinet staff.

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"U.S. Isn't Listening"  
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¶13. (C) FM Aboul Gheit opened the conversation by stressing the need for greater U.S. understanding of the social milieu in which it presses its democracy agenda. Egypt has tried to convince Washington of this point, Aboul Gheit said, but "the U.S. is not a good listener." In the entire region, there is a strong sense among ordinary people that a great injustice has been done to the Palestinian people, which creates resentment and an urge to reject Western viewpoints. Using these sentiments to their advantage, Islamists are winning "the street," Aboul Gheit added. We must work together, he said, to assist the Palestinian Authority and find a just solution to the Palestinian issue.

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Time Running Out; Iran's Accelerating its Nuclear Weapons Program  
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¶14. (C) After acknowledging the importance to the U.S. of both democracy-promotion and the Palestinian issue, U/S Joseph stressed the urgency of other pressing issues - especially Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran, with or without nuclear weapons, is a threat to the entire region, he said, in part because it uses terror to promote its policies in Lebanon, Iraq, and elsewhere. With a nuclear weapons capability, that

threat would become even more intense. A nuclear-armed Iran would change fundamentally the strategic calculus of the region, with a number of adverse effects. Among others, this includes the real risk of additional proliferation in the region, as key regional governments could re-think their defense postures; this could have catastrophic consequences. Joseph underscored that we continue to seek acceptable diplomatic solutions to the problem at hand, but also reiterated that diplomacy has taken considerable time, that Iran remains in non-compliance with the IAEA and continues to defy the UNSC, and that Iran is approaching the "point of no return," from a technical standpoint, in the development of its capabilities. While an expansion of dialogue on such pressing issues is worthwhile, U/S Joseph argued, we must also be prepared to undertake a set of defensive measures designed to demonstrate a united front against Iranian actions and to defend our common security interests. Aboul Gheit interjected that "no one is challenging" the threat of a nuclear Iran.

¶15. (C) Responding to U/S Joseph's expression of appreciation for Egypt's support at the IAEA, Aboul Gheit described domestic upset over his decision. At a recent public conference, he described how students had publicly challenged him to explain why Egypt would resist "an Islamic nuclear capability." His response to the group -that Iran, with nuclear weapons, would seek to impose its hegemony over the whole region -- was poorly received. Pointing again to domestic unease with GOE policy in this area, Aboul Gheit called for close and early consultation as we moved forward on this issue.

¶16. (C) Again stressing Egypt's opposition to a nuclear-armed Iran ("Nazi Germany in the Gulf"), Aboul Gheit urged the U.S. not to attack Iran, and to rely on diplomacy to defuse the

current crisis. He then pressed familiar arguments on the importance to Egypt and the region of addressing Israel's nuclear program. U/S Joseph argued in turn that Iran was a much more urgent threat to the stability of both the Middle East and the entire nonproliferation regime. Holding back on the needed defensive measures with Iran now, or diluting our focus on Iran pending resolution of the Palestine question would be unacceptable, he said. Such an approach would lose valuable time with respect to countering Iran, while it would not likely solve the Israeli challenge articulated by the foreign minister; indeed, should Iran succeed, it is possible that Israel's nuclear posture may evolve as well. Implementing defensive measures on a timely and effective basis strengthen the chances for diplomatic successes with respect to the Iranian program.

¶17. (C) Expanding on his point about reaching a diplomatic, vice military, solution to the present crisis, Aboul Gheit suggested that an arrangement be negotiated with Tehran to recognize and freeze its nuclear "achievements" to date, while ensuring "close observation" of its programs for "three or four years," before consideration of additional steps. We don't want you to attack Iran, as the entire Arab world would come under "maximum pressure," he said. Chapter VII sanctions, he continued, would be ineffective and counterproductive. You should find some way out with the Russians and Chinese, he said, that might allow the Iranians to "save face;" pushing them into a corner "will only build support for the regime." Whatever the United States does will affect the stability of Egypt and the region more broadly. Joseph reiterated that we want diplomacy to work, but also that the growing threat is very clear. Iran, in defiance of the IAEA and the UNSC, has accelerated its nuclear weapons program. We don't have the luxury of several years and numerous Security Council resolutions to resolve this vital issue.

¶8. (C) U/S Joseph moved the conversation to one particular defensive measure, the PSI, asking where Egypt was on this issue, last discussed during Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation Stephen Rademaker's visit. Noting that it has not yet signed the Statement of Interdiction Principles, Joseph noted that Egypt surely is for efforts to counter the proliferation of WMD-related materials and technologies. In our experience, when states are slow to consider U.S. calls for their participation, this could be a sign of opposition to the initiative - which would be odd in this case, since Egypt appears to support PSI objectives. In response, Aboul Gheit turned to his staff and told them in Arabic to get the interagency review process moving faster in order for Egypt to determine how it should respond. (Note: MFA and MoD officials were to meet April 19 to discuss the PSI. End note).

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Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy  
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¶9. (C) Aboul Gheit asked about U.S. policy regarding the development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, prompting discussion of the U.S.-India civil nuclear cooperation initiative. Aboul Gheit said some U.S. companies had approached the GOE recently, offering to support renewed U.S. interest in commercial nuclear energy development. U/S Joseph promised to share a paper on the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, and briefly laid out U.S. thinking on shaping the future of nuclear energy while also meeting nonproliferation objectives.

¶10. (C) Aboul Gheit asked for details on India's civil nuclear energy program, and wondered why we had not also reached a deal with nuclear-armed Pakistan. Citing Pakistan's track record on proliferation, as revealed by the exposures of the A.Q. Khan network, as well as its lesser energy requirements, the U.S. had a different approach to Islamabad, U/S Joseph said. Further detailing the arrangement with India, U/S Joseph discussed the energy and nonproliferation benefits inherent in the effort. While India is unlikely to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state for the foreseeable term, through our deal with New Delhi, we managed to secure their commitments to refrain from nuclear testing, not to share enrichment and reprocessing technologies with states that do not already have them, to work toward a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, to comply with Nuclear Supplier Group and Missile Technology Control Regime Guidelines, and to put its civil nuclear program under IAEA safeguards and an

Additional Protocol.

¶11. (U) Under Secretary Joseph's party cleared this cable.  
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